

CHAPTER 17

Banî Isrâ'îl: The Children of Isrâ'îl

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 12 *sections*; 111 *verses*)

This chapter goes under the name of *The Isrâ'îlites*, who, after being made a great nation and having risen to power and eminence in the world, were severely punished on account of their transgressions. It opens and ends with a reference to the history of that nation.

The opening reference is to the *Mi'râj*, the *Ascension of the Holy Prophet*, which must be interpreted as referring to the eminence which he was to achieve and to the greatness to which Islâm was to rise. The Muslims are warned of the fate of the Isrâ'îlite nation, which after rising to eminence was punished twice on account of its misdeeds. The reference no doubt is being to a similar fate, which was to befall the Muslims. The second section establishes the immortal principle that every deed has a consequence, the universal law of cause and effect, a right understanding of which alone can raise man to the true dignity which befits humanity. The next two sections contain moral precepts which the Muslims are required to follow. Yet all these high moral teachings only cause the disbelievers to grow harder, as is shown in the fifth section. The sixth deals with the punishment of the earlier as well as the later opponents of Truth, disclosing the marvellous prophecy that a time would come when the whole world would find itself in the jaws of destruction. The seventh section refers to the universal law that the mischief-makers have always stood up in opposition to the righteous, and the eighth speaks specifically of the opposition to the Holy Prophet. The next section, however, makes it clear that that opposition would be brought to naught, for falsehood must disappear before the advance of Truth. The advent of the Holy Prophet has been here described as the advent of the Truth, *the spirit of Truth* mentioned by St. John. The tenth shows how great a miracle is the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân in itself, yet the opponents seek other signs. How trivial are the excuses on which they reject the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân is set forth in the eleventh section, and the justice of their retribution is thus made clear. The last section draws attention to Mûsâ's warning to Pharaoh, the mighty ruler of Egypt, and gives a similar warning

through the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, ending with a brief mention of the absurdity of the doctrine of “sonship”, which is dealt with at length in the two chapters that follow. As regards the date of revelation of this chapter, there are many indications that it belongs to the early Makkan period, and must have been revealed in, or about, the fifth year of the Call. The mention of *Isrâ'*, which is the same as *Mi'râj*, in the very first verse, shows it to be an early revelation because *Mi'râj* is also mentioned in another chapter, *The Star*, which is also one of the early revelations. Ibn Mas'ûd, who was one of the early converts to Islâm, is reported to have said, speaking of the five chapters, 17th to 21st: “They are of the early revelations and they are the ones that I committed to memory first” (Bukhârî 66:6).

SECTION 1: *Isrâ'îlites punished Twice*

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him of Our signs!^a Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

2 And We gave Mûsâ the Book and made it a guidance to the Children of Isrâ'îl (saying): Take no guardian beside Me^a—

3 The offspring of those whom We bore with Nûh. Surely he was a grateful servant.

4 And We made known to the Children of Isrâ'îl in the Book: Certainly you will make mischief in the land twice, and behave insolently with mighty arrogance.^a

1a. The carrying by night of the Prophet from the Sacred Mosque at Makkah to the Remote Mosque at Jerusalem is in reference to the Prophet's reported Ascension. Though Bukhârî speaks of *Isrâ'* in Bukhârî 63:41 and of *Mi'râj* in Bukhârî 63:42, yet elsewhere he speaks of *the prayers being made obligatory on the night of Isrâ'*, and then goes on to narrate the *hadîth* which speaks of *Mi'râj* and of the prayers being made obligatory in *Mi'râj* (Bukhârî 8:1). *Isrâ'* is, in fact, the first stage in *Mi'râj*, as before his Ascension to *samâ'*, the Prophet was taken to the Remote Mosque, or the Temple at Jerusalem. That the Ascension was not a translation of the body, but the *visionary* experience of the Holy Prophet, is shown in 60b, where it is expressly called a *ru'yâ* or a *vision*. As the significance of the Ascension was the *visionary* eminence

of the Holy Prophet and indicated his triumph in the world, his being carried to the Temple at Jerusalem signified that he would also inherit the blessings of the Isrâ'îlite prophets.

2a. The first verse really prophesies a great future for Islâm and the Muslims, while this warns them of the pitfalls of greatness, citing the instance of a nation that had been made to rise to eminence before them.

4a. Compare 5:78: "Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Isrâ'îl were cursed by the tongue of Dâwûd and 'Îsâ, son of Maryam". Jerusalem was destroyed twice as a punishment for the transgressions of the Jews, once by the Babylonians, and again by the Romans. See Jesus' warning in Matthew 23:38: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," and Luke 21:24: "And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles," and various other like references. The Psalms are also replete with warnings.

5 So when of the two, the first warning came to pass, We raised against you Our servants, of mighty prowess, so they made havoc in (your) houses. And it was an accomplished threat.

6 Then We gave you back the turn against them, and aided you with wealth and children and made you a numerous band.^a

7 If you do good, you do good for your own *nafs*. And if you do evil, it is for them. So when the second warning came, (We raised another people) that they might bring you to grief and that they might enter the Mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy, whatever they conquered, with utter destruction.^a

8 It may be that your *Rabb* will have mercy on you. And if you return (to mischief), We will return (to punishment).^a And We have made hell a prison for the disbelievers.

6a. Verse 5 relates the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem and the murder, imprisonment, and banishment of the Jews by the Babylonians in the year 588 B.C., while verse 6 relates to the return of the Jews and rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, and to their subsequent prosperity. This is the turn of fortune spoken of here.

7a. This verse describes the destruction of the Temple a second time, which was accomplished by the Romans under Titus. The personal pronouns refer in all cases to the enemy, whoever he might be, and by no means indicate that the same enemy who first destroyed the Temple would do so on the second occasion. In the history of the

Isrâ'îlites, there is a prophetic reference to the history of the Muslims. The Caliphate of Islâm was destroyed twice, first by the Mongols under Hulagu in 656 A.H. (1258 A.D.), and again by the powers of Europe recently. But while in the case of the Israelites, their very Temple, their religious centre, was laid waste on both occasions, the religious centre of Islâm, the Ka'bah, has remained intact on both occasions under a Divine promise, though Muslim temporal rule suffered a severe reverse. The Jews were ruined both temporally and religiously, but the Muslim suffering has affected only its temporal aspect. As a matter of fact, in both great reverses in Muslim history, Islâm has religiously gained a conquest. The destruction of the Caliphate in 1258 was followed by the Mongols and Turks coming over to Islâm *en masse*, and the present-day afflictions of Islâm are giving birth to a religious resuscitation of the world with Islâm in the forefront. Along with the religious resurrection of Islâm, however, on both occasions, there has been a revival of its temporal power as well.

9 Surely this Qur'ân guides to that which is most upright, and gives good news to the believers who do good that theirs is a great reward,

10 And that those who believe not in the Hereafter, We have prepared for them a painful chastisement.

SECTION 2: Every Deed has a Consequence

11 And human beings pray for evil as he or she ought to pray for good; and human beings is ever hasty.

12 And We made the night and the day two signs, then We have made the sign of the night to pass away^a and We have made the sign of the day manifest, so that you may seek grace from your *Rabb*, and that you may know the numbering of years and the reckoning. And We have explained everything with distinctness.

8a. This relates to the advent of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad, when the Isrâ'îlites were again given a chance to reform, but they are told that if they return to mischief they will again be punished. When the Holy Prophet came to Madînah, the Jews were at first in a conciliatory mood, but their enmity increased day by day, until they joined hands with the enemies of Islâm, devising plans to take his very life. The result was that they were swept out of Arabia, while their lot in all other countries of the world

has always been one of hard trials and severe afflictions, and religiously the Jewish religion has no future.

12a. The night stands for the darkness of ignorance and unbelief (see 2:257a), and the passing away of the night indicates that ignorance will vanish and the light of Islâm will take its place. Arabia witnessed this sign thirteen hundred years ago, and Islâm has since then been gradually advancing in the world; and now there are clear indications that the day is not distant when the sun of Islâm will shine forth in its full resplendence over the whole world. Some understand that by the two signs of the night and the day are meant the moon and the sun, and that the passing away of the sign of the night indicates that the moon does not possess original light.

13 And We have made every human being's actions to cling to his or her neck,^a and We shall bring forth to him or her on the day of Resurrection a book which he or she will find wide open.

14 Read your book. Your own *nafs* is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.^a

15 Whoever goes aright, for his or her own *nafs* does he or she go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he or she go astray. And no bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another.^a Nor do We chastise until We raise a messenger.^b

16 And when We wish to destroy a town, We send commandments^a to its people who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction.

13a. *Tâ'ir* (literally, *bird*) means the actions of a human being, which are, as it were, attached as a necklace to his or her neck (*Al-Qâmûs al-Muhîṭ* (Dictionary), by Shaiḫh Majd al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qûb Al-Firozâbâdî and the *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Why this significance was attached to the word is explained by an Arab superstition. It was a custom of the Arabs to augur good and evil from birds, by observing whether a bird flew away of itself or by being roused, whether it flew to the right or to the left, or directly upwards, and the proposed action was accordingly deemed good or evil; hence the word came to signify *good and evil actions* (*Al-Taḥsîn al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). The verse reveals the principle that every action produces an effect which is made to cling to a man, and that this very effect will be met with on the day of Resurrection in the form of a wide-open book. It is thus by leaving its effect behind that every action of human

beings is recorded, and this very effect constitutes the book of a human being's actions. Clinging to the neck indicates the inseparability of one thing from another, thus establishing the law of cause and effect.

14a. This verse throws a flood of light on the nature of the reckoning on the day of Resurrection and the *wazn* and the *mîzân* (7:8; 55:7), showing clearly that it is nothing but a complete manifestation of the effects of the deeds done in this life.

15a. This verse strikes at the root of the doctrine of atonement. The burden of the sins of one human being cannot be taken away by another, for, as already stated, the effect of each human being's actions clings to them. The other burdens spoken of in 29:13 — they will carry their own burdens and other burdens with their own burdens — are the burdens of misleading others, while those others are also answerable for their own errors.

15b. Here it is stated that guidance is offered to human beings through a messenger of Allâh, but if they still persists in error and strays from the path, it is to their own detriment. And then it is added that the punishment of the Hereafter is only after human beings has been warned through a Divine messenger: *Nor do We chastise until We raise a messenger*. The law as to punishment in this world is stated in v. 16, which speaks of the destruction of towns, for such punishment is sent when tyranny and transgression assume extraordinary proportions, and punishment is then inflicted on large numbers.

17 And how many generations did We destroy after Nûh! And your *Rabb* suffices as being Aware and Seer of His servants' sins.

18 Whoso desires this transitory life, We hasten to him or her therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him or her the hell; he or she will enter it despised, driven away.

19 And whoso desires the Hereafter and strives for it as he or she ought to strive and he or she is a believer — those are they whose striving is amply rewarded.

20 All do We aid — these as well as those — out of the bounty of your *Rabb*, and the bounty of your *Rabb* is not limited.

21 See how We have made some of them to excel others. And certainly the Hereafter is greater in degrees and greater in excellence.

22 Associate not any other deity with Allâh, lest thou sit down despised, forsaken.

SECTION 3: Moral Precepts

23 And your *Rabb* has decreed that you serve none but Him, and do good to parents.^a If either or both of them reach old age with thee, say not “Fie” to them, nor chide them, and speak to them a generous word.

16a. These words are sometimes misunderstood. Allâh does not command people to transgress, for it is plainly stated in 7:28: “Allâh enjoins not indecency”; and again in 16:90: “He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion”. The meaning is clear: Allâh sends them commandments to do good, pointing out the right way through His prophets, but as they are accustomed to lead easy lives, they transgress those commandments, and are therefore punished.

24 And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say: My *Rabb*, have mercy on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little.

25 Your *Rabb* knows best what is in your minds. If you are righteous, He is surely Forgiving to those who turn (to Him).

26 And give to the near of kin his due and (to) the needy and the wayfarer, and squander not wastefully.

27 Surely the squanderers are the *shaitân*’s brethren. And the *shaitân* is ever ungrateful to his *Rabb*.^a

28 And if you turn away from them to seek mercy from your *Rabb*, which you hope for, speak to them a gentle word.^a

29 And make not your hand to be shackled to your neck, nor stretch it forth to the utmost (limit) of its stretching forth, lest you sit down blamed, stripped off.^a

23a. Obedience to parents is placed next to submission to Allâh, for among fellow-beings none has a greater claim upon a person than his parents. Moreover, obedience to parents is the seed from which, if the child is properly taught this lesson, springs the great obligation of obedience to all constituted authority.

27a. While enjoining charity, the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân also draws attention to economy, thus indicating the golden mean. Those who waste wealth are called the *shaitân*’s brethren, because they are ungrateful to Allâh for wasting away what He has given them out of His grace.

28a. The *hoping for mercy from the Rabb* means standing in need of the bounty of the *Rabb*, i.e., *not having aught to give to the needy*. In that case one should still speak to the needy gently and not chide him with harshness. A saying of the Holy Prophet declares a gentle word spoken to a fellow human being to be a deed of charity (Bukhârî 56:72).

30 Surely your *Rabb* makes plentiful the means of subsistence for whom He pleases, and He straitens. Surely He is ever Aware, Seer, of His servants.

SECTION 4: Moral Precepts

31 And kill not your children for fear of poverty — We provide for them and for you. Surely the killing of them is a great wrong.^a

32 And go not nigh to fornication: surely it is an obscenity. And evil is the way.^a

33 And kill not the *nafs* which Allâh has forbidden except for a just cause. And whoever is slain unjustly, We have indeed given to his heir authority — but let him not exceed the limit in slaying. Surely he will be helped.^a

34 And draw not nigh to the orphan's property, except in a goodly way, till he attains his maturity. And fulfil the promise; surely, the promise will be enquired into.

29a. By the shackling of the hand to the neck is meant being niggardly in one's expenses, and by stretching it forth to its utmost extent, being so profuse as to waste away all one's substance. The verse supplies a general rule regarding the mean to be adopted in one's ordinary expenses, and thus inculcates the duty of economy.

31a. Infanticide, in the case of daughters, was met with among the Arabs, but this was not for fear of poverty. According to *Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, *killing of children* here means *not giving them proper education*; ignorance, or intellectual death, being treated as death. The word *aulâd* (children) includes both males and females, and this explanation is therefore more reasonable. Or the reference may be to the modern evil of birth-control, which also amounts to the slaying of offspring.

32a. This is another evil which is becoming prevalent with the growth of civilization. The Qur'ân not only forbids fornication but enjoins men not to go near it, thus

avoiding all those opportunities which are likely to tempt one to fall into the evil. Hence it is that Islâm discourages the too free intermingling of the sexes.

33a. This verse contains nothing inconsistent with what is said in 2:178. The words *he will be helped* indicate that as the government is bound to help him by bringing the murderer within reach of the law; the heir should not take the law into his own hands. This is called exceeding the limits.

35 And give full measure when you measure out, and weigh with a true balance. This is fair and better in the end.

36 And follow not that of which you have no knowledge.^a Surely the hearing and the sight and the heart, of all of these it will be asked.

37 And go not about in the land exultingly, for you can not rend the earth, nor reach the mountains in height.

38 All this, the evil thereof, is hateful in the sight of your *Rabb*.

39 This is of the wisdom which your *Rabb* has revealed to you. And associate not any other deity with Allâh lest you be thrown into hell, blamed, cast away.

40 Has then your *Rabb* preferred to give you sons, and (for Himself) taken daughters from among the *malâ'ikah*? Surely you utter a grievous saying.

SECTION 5: Disbelievers grow harder

41 And certainly We have repeated (warnings) in this Qur'ân that they may be mindful. And it adds not save to their aversion.^a

36a. If this injunction were followed, all society gossip would immediately cease, thereby relieving many an innocent man and woman of the heart-burning which he or she suffers on account of evil and unfounded reports. The verse also forbids entering into discussions without accurate knowledge, or proffering uncertain opinion. In fact, peace and contentment would reign in society, instead of mutual strife and hatred, if the injunction were observed.

41a. Allâh's purpose in repeating arguments and signs in the Qur'ân is clearly to make human beings mindful, but the more they are reminded, the greater is their aversion to it.

42 Say: If there were with Him deities, as they say, then certainly they would have been able to seek a way to the Lord of the Throne.^a

43 Glory to Him! and He is highly exalted above what they say!

44 The seven samâwât and the earth and those in them declare His glory. And there is not a single thing but glorifies Him with His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Surely He is Forbearing, Forgiving.^a

45 And when you recite the Qur'ân, We place between you and those who believe not in the Hereafter a hidden barrier;^a

46 And We put coverings on their hearts and a deafness in their ears lest they understand it; and when you make mention of your *Rabb* alone in the Qur'ân, they turn their backs in aversion.^a

42a. The idol-worshippers were sunk deep in vices and immorality, while access to the Divine Being — *a way to the Lord of the Throne* — which they claimed they got through their idols, should have purified their lives. “We serve them only,” said the idolaters, “that they may bring us nearer to Allâh” (39:3). But nearness to Allâh, Who is the source of purity, was meaningless in the case of those who led impure lives. Or, the meaning is that, if they had access to Allâh, Who holds all power in His hands, they should have certainly received Divine help and been successful in uprooting Islâm.

44a. The whole universe is here mentioned as declaring the glory of Allâh. *Tasbîh* is synonymous with *tanzîh*, and means *the declaring Allâh to be free from every imperfection and impurity or from everything derogatory to His dignity* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). This declaration need not be with the tongue and in words: in fact, the very dependence of the whole creation on the Creator and its consequent imperfection is a glorification of the Creator.

45a. This hidden barrier is nothing but that erected by their own aversion, as plainly indicated in verse 41. Allâh, according to that verse, sends the Qur'ân to remind them, but because of their aversion to it a barrier is imposed between them and it.

46a. The placing of the coverings on the hearts and deafness in the ears of the disbelievers is no doubt attributed to Allâh as the prime cause of all things, but how this covering or heaviness is directly brought about is plainly indicated in the latter part of the verse. It is because they do not even listen to the mention of Allâh, and flee in aversion from His word, that there follows a deafness in their ears and a covering

on their hearts. Allâh brings it about, but He brings it about on account of the condition of their very hearts and ears. This is made very clear in 7:179: “They have hearts wherewith they understand not, and they have eyes wherewith they see not, and they have ears wherewith they hear not.”

47 We know best what they listen to when they listen to you, and when they take counsel secretly, when the wrongdoers say: You follow only a man deprived of reason.

48 See what they liken you to! So they have gone astray, and cannot find the way.

49 And they say: When we are bones and decayed particles, shall we then be raised up as a new creation?

50 Say: Be stones or iron,

51 Or some other creature of those which are too hard (to receive life) in your minds!^a But they will say: Who will return us? Say: He Who created you at first. Still they will shake their heads at you and say: When will it be? Say: Maybe it has drawn nigh.^b

52 On the day when He will call you forth, then will you obey Him, giving Him praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little (while).

SECTION 6: **Punishment must follow**

53 And say to My servants that they speak what is best. Surely the *shaitân* sows dissensions among them. The *shaitân* is surely an open enemy to human beings.^a

51a. The Arabs denied a life after death, giving as an argument that they would be reduced to decayed particles, and that hence there was no possibility of their being raised to life again. They are told that a life after death must follow even if they could change themselves into stones. And the spiritual life with which they were quickened by the Holy Prophet, notwithstanding their hard-heartedness — “they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness” (2:74) — afforded a clear proof of the fulfilment of the statement made here.

51b. The shaking of the head is to indicate one’s disbelief in a thing. The answer, *maybe it has drawn nigh*, refers to the spiritual resuscitation of Arabia, which was now to be accomplished through the Holy Prophet, as an indication of the greater

Resurrection. The next verse makes it clear: *Then will you obey Him, giving Him praise*. Fifteen years after this the whole of Arabia resounded with Divine praises.

54 Your *Rabb* knows you best. He will have mercy on you, if He pleases, or He will chastise you, if He pleases. And We have not sent thee as being in charge of them.^a

55 And your *Rabb* best knows those who are in the *samâwât* and the earth. And certainly We made some of the prophets to excel others,^a and to Dâwûd We gave the Zabûr.

56 Say: Call on those whom you assert besides Him; they have no power to remove distress from you or to change.

57 Those whom they call upon, themselves seek the means of access to their *Rabb* — whoever of them is nearest — and they hope for His mercy and fear His chastisement. Surely the chastisement of your *Rabb* is a thing to be cautious of.^a

53a. The Muslims — My servants — are here enjoined to be very kind when they speak to the disbelievers. It is related that when the Muslims complained to the Holy Prophet that they were abused by the idolaters, they were told to be kind and not to retaliate (*Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu'în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn). And why? Because it was the *shaitân* that was causing these quarrels. The words evidently imply that these dissensions were only transient, and that the two parties would again become united.

54a. It should be noted that in this verse, as elsewhere, *mercy* is mentioned first, thus showing that Divine mercy has precedence over Divine retribution.

55a. By saying that some of the prophets are made to excel others, the excellence of the Holy Prophet over others is implied. David is specially mentioned, because, as stated in the Psalms, he prayed for the utter destruction of his enemies, whereas the above two verses show that the Holy Prophet was enjoined to deal mercifully with his opponents. As regards Dâwûd's invoking curses and destruction on wicked judges and on his enemies, see the Psalms: "Break their teeth, O God ... let them melt away as waters ... let them be as cut in pieces ... let every one of them pass away" (Psalms 58:6– 8); "Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors" (Psalms 59:5); "Consume them in wrath, consume them that they may not be" (Psalms 59:13). For *Zabûr*, see 3:184a.

58 And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement. That is written in the Book.^a

59 And nothing hindered Us from sending signs, but the ancients rejected them.^a And We gave to Thamûd the she-camel, a manifest sign, but they did her wrong, and We send not signs but to warn.

60 And when We said to you: Surely your *Rabb* encompasses human beings.^a And We made not the vision which We showed you but a trial for human beings,^b as also the tree cursed^c in the Qur'ân. And We warn them, but it only adds to their great inordinacy.

57a. This verse and v. 56 seem to refer to the worship of prophets, saints, and rabbis by the Christians and the Jews. Explaining the words *whom they call upon*, *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu'în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn adds, *as the angels and Jesus and his mother and Ezra*. These divinities, it is argued, themselves hoped for Divine mercy and feared His retribution; the nearer a person to the Divine Being, the greater was his hope of mercy and his fear of punishment if he disobeyed.

58a. There is a prophetic reference here to great disasters which would ruin populous towns. The addition of the words “before the day of Resurrection” clearly points to the fact that the destruction of the towns does not refer to the end of things. The Second World War has but given us a glimpse of what is yet in store for this world, if a Third War breaks out. Already we have seen the fulfilment of this prophecy in the destruction of populous towns in almost every country of the world on an unprecedented scale, but it is nothing compared with the havoc which the atom bomb or the hydrogen bomb and other inventions of this modern age are likely to work, if the mad struggle for power is not ended. It should be noted that the prophecy of the ruination of populous towns is here mentioned as a part of the Divine scheme in the ultimate triumph of Islâm with which this chapter deals, and hence the reference to the sending of signs in the next verse.

59a. After speaking of a great sign in the latter days, the destruction of towns on a large scale, this verse speaks of a general law that Allâh has always been sending signs to establish truth, and that nothing ever hindered Him from sending signs,

though such signs were rejected by the people to whom they were sent. It is further made clear that signs are sent to warn people of the evil consequences of doing evil.

60a. *Ahâta* (root *haut*) *bi-hî* means *he encompassed or surrounded him, he had him in his grasp* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). By *men* are meant *those who opposed the Truth*, the reference being to the utter discomfiture of the enemy.

60b. The reference here is to the *vision of Ascension* or the *Mi'râj* (Bukhârî 63:42), which was really a prophecy of the ultimate triumph of Islâm; see 1a which states: The carrying by night of the Prophet from the Sacred Mosque at Makkah to the Remote Mosque at Jerusalem is in reference to the Prophet's reported Ascension. Though Bukhârî speaks of *Isrâ'* in Bukhârî 63:41 and of *Mi'râj* in B. 63:42, yet elsewhere he speaks of *the prayers being made obligatory on the night of Isrâ'*, and then goes on to narrate the *hadîth* which speaks of *Mi'râj* and of the prayers being made obligatory in *Mi'râj* (Bukhârî 8:1). *Isrâ'* is, in fact, the first stage in *Mi'râj*, as before his Ascension to *samâ'*, the Prophet was taken to the Remote Mosque, or the Temple at Jerusalem. That the Ascension was not a translation of the body, but the *visionary* experience of the Holy Prophet, which we are analysing: where it is expressly called a *ru'yâ* or a *vision* in this verse 17:60. As the significance of the Ascension was the *visionary* eminence of the Holy Prophet and indicated his triumph in the world, his being carried to the Temple at Jerusalem signified that he would also inherit the blessings of the Isrâ'îlite prophets.

There has been a difference of opinion among the learned as to whether the Holy Prophet's Ascension was bodily or non-bodily; the majority adhere to the first view, but among those who hold the latter view there are personages of sound opinion, such as 'Â'ishah and Mu'âwiyah. In view of the plain words of the Qur'ân, however, which refer to the Ascension as being '*the vision which We showed you*,' the opinion of the majority must be rejected. The sayings of the Holy Prophet support this view. Thus in a report it is stated that the *malak* came to him *on another night when his heart saw, and the Prophet (peace be on him), his eyes slept but his heart did not sleep; and such are the prophets, their eyes sleep but their hearts do not sleep, then Jibrîl accompanied him and he carried him to samâ'* (Bukhârî 61:24). The concluding words of another report which speaks of the *Mi'râj* are: "And he awoke and he was in the Sacred Mosque" (Bukhârî 98:37). In another report the words describing the condition in which he was at the time of Ascension are, *whilst I was in a state between that of one sleeping and one awake* (Bukhârî 59:6). In fact, it is quite true that he was

not asleep — he was in a *vision*, but at the same time it was not a corporeal Ascension. He was actually carried to the Holy Presence, and he was shown great wonders, but it was in the vision that he was carried, and it was with the *visionary-eye* that he saw those wonders, not in body and with the physical eye, for things *visionary* can only be seen with the *visionary-eye*. And this *vision* had an important significance. He saw it at a time when his condition was, to human seeming, one of utmost helplessness, and he was shown that a great future lay before him. His opponents, as usual, disbelieved in such *visions*, and laughed at him.

60c. The cursed tree is the tree of *zaqqûm* (Bukhârî 63:42). According to the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, every good action is a good tree and every evil action is an evil tree. One explanation of the cursed tree being a trial for the disbelievers is given in 37:62a. But the statement is made here in contrast with the Prophet's *vision*, and both, in fact, have a deeper significance. As the Prophet's *vision* signified his future triumph and gave an indication of the greatness to which Islâm would rise, the statement made elsewhere that the tree of *zaqqûm* was the food of sinners (44:43, 44) contained a prophecy of the discomfiture of the enemies of Islâm, telling them that a deadly food was in store for them. It was these two prophecies that the opponents laughed to scorn; hence they were a trial for them. And the reason why the *vision* and the statement about the cursed tree are conjoined is thus evident. The triumph of Islâm and the discomfiture of the enemy went hand in hand.

SECTION 7: The shaitân's Opposition to the Righteous

61 And when We said to the *malâ'ikah*: Be submissive to *Âdam*; they submitted, except *Iblîs*.^a He said: Shall I submit to him whom You have created of dust?

62 He said: See You? This is he whom You have honoured above me! If You respite me to the day of Resurrection, I will certainly cause his progeny to perish except a few.

61a. See 2:34a, 34b, 34c. For human being's creation from dust, see 7:12a.

63 He said: Begone! Whoever of them follows you surely hell is your recompense, a full recompense.

64 And incite whom you can of them with your voice,^a and collect against them your horse and your foot,^b and share with them in wealth and children,^c and promise them. And the shaitân promises them only to deceive.

65 My servants — you have surely no authority over them.^a And your *Rabb* suffices as having charge of affairs.

66 Your *Rabb* is He Who speeds the ships for you in the sea that you may seek of His grace. Surely He is ever Merciful to you.

67 And when distress afflicts you in the sea, away go those whom you call on except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn away. And human beings is ever ungrateful.^a

68 Do you then feel secure that He will not bring you low on a tract of land, or send on you a violent wind?^a Then you will not find a protector for yourselves;

64a. The shaitân is here compared with a coward who comes with great show but little real force, and who, if shown the least resistance, retreats at every step. According to ‘*Abd Allâh ibn ‘Abbâs* (Companion), *every inviter who invites (others) to the disobedience of Allâh is a shaitân uttering the cry* (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn).

64b. The forces of the shaitân are no other than the evildoers, those going quickly into evil being likened to horsemen and those who walk slowly in their evil course being likened to infantry. According to *Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn, by the shaitân’s *horse and foot* are meant *fast riders and slow walkers in disobedience*.

64c. The sharing of the devil in wealth signifies *everything spent unlawfully or acquired unlawfully*; and *sharing in children* is in reference to *committing fornication, which results in illegitimate births* (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn).

65a. *My servants* may include all human beings. The shaitân will say to the sinners: I had no authority over you (14:22); see 14:22c.

67a. A true picture is drawn here of human nature, which turns to Allâh in affliction but forgets Him in ease.

69 Or, do you feel secure that He will not take you back into it another time, then send on you a fierce gale and thus overwhelm you for your ungratefulness?^a Then you will not find any aider against Us in the matter.

70 And surely We have honoured the children of Âdam, and We carry them in the land and the sea, and We provide them with good things, and We have made them to excel highly most of those whom We have created.

SECTION 8: **Opposition to the Prophet**

71 On the day when We shall call every people with their leader:^a then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these will read their book; and they will not be dealt with a whit unjustly.^b

72 And whoever is blind in this (world) he will be blind in the Hereafter, and further away from the path.^a

68a. *Hâsib* primarily means *a thrower or pelter of stones* and *rîh-un hâsib-un* signifies *a violent wind that raises pebbles* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The word is also applied to *a cloud raining hail*. It was by a violent wind that the combined forces of all the enemies of Islâm were brought low in the battle of the Allies, when, besieging Madînah in the year 5 A.H., they had to flee in disorder.

69a. Distress is here likened to the sea.

71a. The meaning is that the righteous will follow the righteous leaders and the wicked will follow their wicked leaders. The word *imam*, or *leader*, here, is interpreted in several other ways, meaning *scripture, prophet, law, book of deeds*. The last of these significances also suits the context, as the books of deeds are spoken of in the words that follow.

71b. This book is the one mentioned in verse 14, i.e., the effect of one's deeds, which will be brought before everyone in a palpable form on the day of Resurrection. The book of deeds is given in the right hand to those who hold the Book of Allâh in their right hands here, i.e., act upon it. As against them are those spoken of in the next verse; they remain blind to the Book of Allâh, so they will be blind in the Hereafter.

73 And surely they had purposed to turn you away from that which We have revealed to you,^a that you should forge against Us other than that, and then they would have taken you for a friend.

74 And if We had not made thee firm, you might have indeed inclined to them a little;

75 Then We would have made you taste a double (punishment) in life and a double (punishment) after death, and then you would not have found any helper against Us.^a

76 And surely they purposed to unsettle you from the land that they might expel you from it, and then they will not tarry after you but a little.^a

72a. We are here told that those who remain blind to truth in this life remain blind in the life after death, which shows that it is here that a hellish life begins with religious blindness, and that the hell of the next life is also a blindness. This is corroborated by what is said in 57:12, that the faithful will have a light on that day.

73a. The commentators think the allusion to be an incident which happened at Madînah long after the revelation of this chapter. But there is a clear and well-authenticated incident regarding the attempt of the Quraish at Makkah, which, both as regards the offer of the Quraish and the firm reply of the Holy Prophet, exactly fits in with the statement of this verse and the one that follows. The chief men of the Quraish met in an assembly and invited the Prophet, saying to him that they were prepared to gather for him wealth or to make him their king, if he gave up speaking against their idols and their evil ways. The Prophet's reply was that he wanted neither of these things, but that it was for their welfare that he asked them to give up evil ways. On an earlier occasion, when a deputation of the Quraish went to Abû Tâlib, the Prophet's uncle, to prevail upon him to dissuade the Prophet from speaking against their idols, and Abû Tâlib told the Prophet that he, too, was unable to defend him against the Quraish, his reply was: "If they place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left and ask me to give up my mission, I will not give it up until the truth prevail or I myself perish in the attempt" [Abû Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mâlik *ibn Hishâm* (Historian)].

75a. The word *idh-an* (*then or in that case*) refers to the concluding words of the last verse. It is thus made clear that notwithstanding all the attempts of his opponents, the Prophet never inclined to them in the least.

76a. When the opponents failed to make the Prophet swerve from the path of Truth, they planned to expel him from the land, though they were told beforehand that in that

case they themselves would not retain power but for a short time. It was only eight years after the Hijrah that the Prophet entered Makkah as a conqueror.

77 (This is Our) way with Our messengers whom We sent before you, and you will not find a change in Our course.^a

SECTION 9: Truth will prevail

78 Keep up prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkness of the night, and the recital of the Qur'ân at dawn. Surely the recital of the Qur'ân at dawn is witnessed.^a

79 And during a part of the night, keep awake^a by it, beyond what is incumbent on you; maybe your *Rabb* will raise you to a position of great glory.^b

77a. Elsewhere this law is stated thus: “And those who disbelieved said to their messengers: We will certainly drive you out of our land unless you come back into our religion. So their *Rabb* revealed to them: We shall certainly destroy the wrongdoers, and We shall certainly settle you in the land after them” (14:13, 14).

78a. After describing how the opponents wanted to bring the Prophet's mission to failure by temptations as well as by threats and by their determination to get rid of him by all means, the Prophet is told to resort to prayer as a solution of the great difficulties with which he was beset. From the declining of the sun to sunset are two prayers, i.e., the *zuhr* and '*asr*', or the early afternoon and later afternoon prayers, while from sunset till darkness there are two others, i.e., the *maghrib* and the '*ishâ*', or the sunset prayer and the prayer at nightfall. The fifth is the morning prayer, which is called here the *Qur'ân al-fajr*, or *the recital of the Qur'ân at dawn*. Thus this verse, which is one of the very early revelations, mentions all the five prayers. It should be noted that the four prayers from *zuhr* to '*ishâ*' are mentioned together because they follow each other after small intervals, while the fifth, the morning prayer, which comes after a long interval, is mentioned separately. The name *Qur'ân al-fajr* given to it is an indication that there is usually a lengthy recitation of the Qur'ân in it. This recitation is called *mashhûd* or *witnessed*, as there is greater concentration of mind at that time.

79a. *Tahajjud* is derived from *hajada*, which means *he slept in the night*, and also *he was wakeful in the night* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The

addition of *by it*, meaning *by means of prayer*, shows the latter significance to be the one meant here. In Islâmic religious terminology *tahajjud* invariably denotes *the prayer said after rising from sleep*, in the latter portion of the night. It is not an obligatory prayer but, as stated here, it is the means of raising a human being to *a position of great glory*. The time at which it is said is most suited for the concentration of mind and for communion with Allâh.

80 And say: My *Rabb*, make me enter a truthful entering, and make me go forth a truthful going forth, and grant me from Your presence an authority to help (me).^a

81 And say: The Truth has come and falsehood vanished. Surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish.^a

82 And We reveal of the Qur'ân that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the wrongdoers.^a

83 And when We bestow favours on human beings, he or she turns away and behaves proudly; and when evil afflicts him, he is in despair.

79b. The man whom the opponents had planned to expel from their city as a helpless man was to be raised to a position of eminent dignity through prayer to Allâh, the prayer in the night in particular. As time passes on, the Prophet is ever rising to positions of greater and greater glory. But while the verse speaks in particular of the Prophet and of the great glory to which he was destined to rise, it gives a promise in general as well that whoever is sincere in calling upon Allâh, especially at night, is raised to a position of glory.

80a. According to 'Abd Allâh ibn 'Abbâs (Companion), the reference here is to the Prophet's Flight, *entering* Madînah and *going forth* from Makkah (*Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur'ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu'în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn). The Prophet was thus told in early revelations that he would have to leave Makkah and find shelter in another place. But the words may also be taken in a general sense, human beings are being taught here to pray that his or her entering into any affair or his or her exit may be marked by truthfulness, and that he or she may be granted Divine help in all their undertakings.

81a. The advent of the Prophet is here spoken of as the advent of the *Truth*, in reference to the prophecy in John 16:13 as to the coming of the "Spirit of truth" to guide men into all truth: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide

you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come.”

The vanishing of falsehood is here spoken of in the past tense to indicate the certainty of its occurrence. Falsehood finally disappeared from Makkah when the Prophet entered it as a conqueror, and as the House of the Holy One was cleared of the idols, the Prophet recited this verse, *The Truth has come and falsehood vanished* (Bukhârî 46:32), thus showing that he understood it to contain the prophecy of the conquest of Makkah. According to another report, he also recited on this occasion 34:49: “Truth has come, and falsehood neither originates, nor reproduces,” showing that idol-worship was being swept away from Arabia forever. The statement made here, however, is general and it means that falsehood cannot stand before Truth and that Truth must finally prevail in the whole world, as it prevailed in Arabia in the lifetime of the Prophet.

82a. The Qur’ân is here called a healing and a mercy for religious diseases, and it is a fact to which history bears testimony that religious diseases were all swept away by the Qur’ân. But, it is added, it is a healing for the believers who follow it, and not for those who reject it, and its rejection brings only greater loss.

84 Say: Everyone acts according to his manner. But your *Rabb* best knows who is best guided on the path.^a

SECTION 10: The Qur’ân — a Unique Guidance

85 And they ask you about the revelation.^a Say: The revelation is by the commandment of my *Rabb*, and of knowledge you are given but a little.

86 And if We please, We could certainly take away that which We have revealed to you, then you would find none to plead (your cause) against Us —

87 But it is a mercy from your *Rabb*. Surely His bounty to you is abundant.

88 Say: If human beings (i.e., ordinary) and *jinn* (i.e., the learned evil ones) should combine together to bring the like of this Qur’ân, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others.^a

89 And certainly We have made clear for human beings in this Qur’ân every kind of description,^a but most human beings consent to naught save denying.

84a. Both the believer and the disbeliever act according to the rules of conduct which they have set before themselves. Who is on the right path is made clear by the consequences which appear later but which are always known to Allâh.

85a. For the word *rûh*, meaning *inspiration* or *revelation*, see 4:171b. Here, before this verse as well as after it, the Qur'ân is the only topic of discussion, and therefore the context shows clearly that the question of the disbelievers is not about the *nafs* of human beings, for which the proper word is only *nafs*, but about the Qur'ân itself, i.e., *the revelation of it*.

88a. For the uniqueness of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, see 2:23a. It may be noted that out of the four places in which the disbelievers are challenged to produce the like of the Qur'ân, this is the only one where the *jinn* and the ordinary *human beings* are spoken of together; in all the other places the *shuhadâ'*, or the *leaders*, take the place of the *jinn*. Bearing in mind that *jinnî* (plural *jinn*) means also a *human beings acting with penetrative energy in his affairs*, it becomes certain that the word *jinn* in this verse conveys the same significance as the word *shuhadâ'* in other verses. This settles conclusively that the word *jinn* is used in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân for the leaders of evil.

90 And they say: We will by no means believe in you, till you cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us,^a

91 Or you have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you cause rivers to flow forth abundantly,

92 Or you cause the *samâ'* to come down upon us in pieces, as you think, or bring Allâh and the *malâ'ikah* face to face (with us),

93 Or you have a house of gold, or you ascend into *samâ'*. And we will not believe in your ascending till you bring down to us a book we can read.

Say: Glory to my *Rabb*! Am I aught but a mortal messenger?^a

SECTION 11: Justice of Retribution

94 And nothing prevents people from believing, when the guidance comes to them, except that they say: Has Allâh raised up a mortal to be a messenger?

89a. *Mathal* is synonymous with *wasf* (*Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain *al-Râghib al-Isfahânî*), and thus a description of anything may be called its *mathal*, though its application to a description by way of comparison or a *parable* is more general. It is here affirmed that all that contributes to the moral and religious welfare of human beings is made distinct in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân.

90a. The signs demanded in this and the following three verses relate to the promises made for the righteous and the threats of punishment for the wicked, as given in the Qur'ân, and they were no doubt fulfilled in due time. But the disbelievers wanted to see the religious blessings of communion with Allâh in a physical shape. The believers were granted gardens with rivers running in them even in this life, and punishment from *samâ'* overtook the opponents, but this was to come about, and did come about, gradually.

93a. The answer to all the demands of the disbelievers is that the Prophet was only a mortal messenger, and the prophecies regarding his own great future or the discomfiture of his enemies would be brought to fulfilment gradually, as in the case of messengers before him.

95 Say: Had there been in the earth *malâ'ikah* walking about secure, We would have sent down to them from the *samâ'* a *malak* as messenger.

96 Say: Allâh suffices for a witness between me and you. Surely He is ever Aware of His servants, Seeing.

97 And he whom Allâh guides, he is on the right way; and he whom He leaves in error, for them you will find no guardians besides Him. And We shall gather them together on the day of Resurrection on their faces, blind and dumb and deaf. Their abode is hell. Whenever it abates, We make them burn the more.

98 This is their retribution because they disbelieve in Our messages and say: When we are bones and decayed particles, shall we then be raised up into a new creation?

99 See they not that Allâh, Who created the *samâwât* and the earth, is able to create the like of them? And He has appointed for them a term, whereof there is no doubt. But the wrongdoers consent to naught but denying.

100 Say: If you control the treasures of the mercy of my *Rabb*, then you would withhold (them) for fear of spending. And human beings are ever niggardly.

SECTION 12: Comparison with Mûsâ

101 And certainly We gave Mûsâ nine clear signs;^a so ask the Children of Isrâ'îl. When he came to them, Pharaoh said to him: Surely I deem you, O Mûsâ, to be one bewitched.

101a. These nine signs are detailed in 7:133^b, where it is shown that they agree with the signs mentioned in Exodus. These signs are the rod, the shining hand, the drought, the loss of fruits, widespread death, the locusts, the lice, the frogs and the blood.

102 He said: Truly you know that none but the *Rabb* of the *samâwât* and the earth has sent these as clear proofs; and surely I believe you, O Pharaoh, to be lost.

103 So he desired to scare them from the land, but We drowned him and those with him, all together;^a

104 And We said to the Children of Isrâ'îl after him: Abide in the land.^a But when the latter promise came, We brought you all rolled up.^b

105 And with truth have We revealed it, and with truth did it come. And We have not sent you but as a giver of good news and as a warner.

106 And it is a Qur'ân We have made distinct, so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it in portions.

107 Say: Believe in it or believe not. Surely those who are given the knowledge before it, fall down prostrate on their faces, when it is recited to them,

108 And say: Glory to our *Rabb*! Surely the promise^a of our *Rabb* was to be fulfilled.

103a. *Istafazza-hû* means *he unsettled him*, and also *he deceived him so as to cast him into destruction*, and *he slew him* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

104a. By the *land* is meant the land promised to the Isrâ'îlites; Mûsâ had asked Pharaoh to allow his people to leave Egypt to settle in the Holy Land (20:47).

104b. The latter promise here relates to the promise given to Mûsâ for the raising up of another prophet like him. This is corroborated by what is said in the next verse about the revelation of the Qur'ân, which came with truth, i.e., in fulfilment of a true promise. By the rolling up of the Isrâ'îlites is meant that they would make way for another people, who would inherit the kingdom of Allâh.

109 And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it adds to their humility.^a

Prostration

110 Say: Call on Allâh or call on the Beneficent.^a By whatever (name) you call on Him, He has the best names. And utter not your prayer loudly nor be silent in it, and seek a way between these.^b

111 And say: Praise be to Allâh! Who has not taken to Himself a son, and Who has not a partner in the kingdom, and Who has not a helper because of weakness; and proclaim His greatness, magnifying (Him).

108a. The *promise* spoken of here is no doubt the promise given to the former prophets regarding the advent of the Holy Prophet; and by *knowledge* in the previous verse is also meant *knowledge of the prophecies*.

109a. The recital of this verse is followed by an actual prostration; see 7:206a.

110a. The name *Rahmân* (Beneficent) seems to have been particularly objectionable to the Arabs, who objected to its use even so late as the truce at Hudaibiyah. The Christians also do not recognize Allâh to be *Rahmân*, because it means that Allâh shows mercy to His creatures without their having done anything to deserve it, while the Christian doctrine of atonement is based on the belief that Allâh cannot show mercy to His creatures without receiving some satisfaction.

110b. The two extremes with regard to prayer are its utterance in a very loud voice or not uttering any word at all with the tongue, thinking that Allâh knows what is in the hearts. The Muslims are told to take the middle course between the two extremes. Utterance of words makes the prayer go deeper down into the heart of human beings, and thus makes it more effective.